

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DACCA 4634

LIMDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDRESSEE ADDED)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ECON, BG, IN

SUBJECT: QUARTERLY REVIEW: WHAT AWAITS THE SECRETARY IN BANGLADESH

SUMMARY: THE THIRD QUARTER OF 1974 SAW BANGLADESH DRIFT
FURTHER INTO ECONOMIC CRISIS. SEVERE FLOODING COMPLICATED
THE ALREADY UNCERTAIN FOOD SUPPLY SITUATION, AND GAVE
SUBSTANCE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF FAMINE. THE AWAMI LEAGUE
INCREASINGLY LOST SUPPORT BUT THE INABILITY OF ITS CRITICS
TO COALESCE AND TO CAPTURE PUBLIC SUPPORT PERMIT IT THE
LUXURY OF CONTINUED MALADMINISTRATION. CRITICISM WILL SURELY
INCREASE, PARTICULARLY AS STARVATION GROWS MORE WIDESPREAD,
BUT OPPONENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO WEIGH CAREFULLY ANY
CHALLENGE TO SHIEKH MUJIB, OUT OF FEAR THAT THEY MAY FAIL OR,
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IF THEY SUCCEED, DRAW DOWN INDIAN WRATH. END SUMMARY.

1. THE THIRD QUARTER OF 1974 BEGAN WITH BANGLADESH DEEPLY TROUBLED BY ITS NEAR BANKRUPTCY IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE (THE IMF PLACED RESERVES AT ABOUT \$60 MILLION) AND INCREASINGLY FEARFUL THAT ITS FOOD SUPPLIES WOULD BE INADEQUATE TO MEET BANGLADESH'S NEEDS IN THE MONTHS OF OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE BDG RECOGNIZED THAT SOLUTIONS TO BOTH PROBLEMS WERE CENTRAL TO THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AND, EQUALLY, TO ITS OWN POPULAR SUPPORT. AS THE QUARTER SUBSEQUENTLY DEMONSTRATED, THE BDG HAD EVERY REASON TO BE APPREHENSIVE. JULY WAS MARKED BY WIDESPREAD FLOODING, DESCRIBED BY SOME AS THE WORST IN TWENTY YEARS, AND IN SEPTEMBER ITS FEARS OF FOOD SHORTAGE BEGAN TO BE REALIZED, WITH THE RURAL IMPROVERISHED MOVING INTO DISTRICT TOWNS AND THE CITY OF DACCA IN ONLY marginally fulfilled hopes of finding food. COMPLICATING EVERYTHING WAS AN UPSURGE IN THE ALREADY SHARP RATE OF INFLATION, WHICH SEVERELY AFFECTED URBAN WORKERS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS. AS THE QUARTER ENDED, STARVATION WAS INCREASINGLY EVIDENT IN SEVERAL AREAS OF THE COUNTRY AND, COMBINED WITH INCREASES IN DISEASE OCCASIONED BY BOTH THE FLOODING AND HUNGER, THE MORTALITY RATE WAS GIVEN AN UPWARD BOOST. (AS AN INDICATOR OF THE INCREASED INCIDENCE OF DISEASE, THE CHOLERA RESEARCH LABORATORY REPORTS CONFIRMED CHOLERA CASES IN SEPTEMBER UP 30-FOLD FROM NOCBAL.).

2. THE PRIMARY CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEEPENING CRISIS HAS BEEN AND INCREASE IN THE EROSION OF CONFIDENCE IN THE BDG AND, PERHAPS EQUALLY PORTENTOUS, THE GROWTH OF ANOMIE. THE ATMOSPHERE HAS BECOME ONE MARKED BY CYNICISM AND DESPAIR, AND THE PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN AND THE RULING AWAMI LEAGUE ARE SEEN AS INCOMPETENT AND CORRUPT, INCAPABLE OF ADMINISTERING THE COUNTRY EFFECTIVELY AND SWAYED BY CONSIDERATIONS OF GREED AND POWER. THE GROWING HOSTILITY TOWARD THOSE IN POWER HAS NOT YET BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY THE EMERGENCE OF AN EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION. ALTHOUGH THE COURTS FOUND UNWARRANTED THE BDG'S IMPOSITION IN DACCA OF SECTION 144 (WHICH PROHIBITS PUBLIC MEETINGS AND PROCESSIONS), THE VARIOUS GROUPS WHICH HAVE BEGUN TO USE THE FREEDOM AFFORDED THEM TO VOICE THEIR CRITICISM OF THE BDG AND THE AWAMI LEAGUE HAVE REMAINED FRAGMENTED AND HAVE YET TO AROUSE POPULAR SUPPORT. RUMORS OF COUP PLANNING

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REMAIN CURRENT, BUT NO COHESIVE AND CONCERTED EFFORT TO DISLODGE THE AWAMI LEAGUE APPEARS TO HAVE BEGUN IN EARNEST.

3. DURING THE QUARTER, THE BDG GAVE MOST OF ITS ATTENTION TO THE GROWING PROBLEM OF FOOD SHORTAGES AND RISING PRICES. WITH THE ONSET OF THE UNUSUALLY HEAVY MONSOONAL FLOODING IN JULY, IT QUICKLY BEGAN A CAMPAIGN TO OBTAIN CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR FLOOD RELIEF. HOWEVER,

IT WAS SOON EVIDENT THAT THE BDG, WHILE CONCERNED OVER THE DAMAGE WHICH WAS BEING DONE BY THE FLOOD, ALSO CONCLUDED THAT A CAMPAIGN FOR RELIEF OF HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS COULD WELL SUPPLEMENT ITS EFFORTS TO OBTAIN BUDGET SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY IF RELIEF WERE TO TAKE THE FORM OF FOOD SUPPLIES.

4. CONCERN ABOUT THE ADEQUACY OF FOOD SUPPLIES HAS ENGROSSED THE BDG OVER THE CURRENT YEAR AND HAS CONTRIBUTED DIRECTLY TO BANGLADESH'S DEEPENING ECONOMIC TROUBLES. THE ORGANIZED SECTOR OF THE ECONOMY HAS DRIFTED FURTHER INTO STAGNATION AND THE MAJOR FACTOR HAS BEEN THE BDG'S DECISION TO SPEND THE BULK OF WHAT LIMITED FOREIGN EXCHANGE IT OBTAINS ON FOODGRAINS. AS A RESULT, BANGLADESH WAS UNABLE TO FINANCE THE IMPORT OF ADEQUATE AMOUNTS OF OTHER KEY CONSUMER GOODS -- E.G., COTTON CLOTH AND COOKING OIL--MUCH LESS DESPERATELY NEEDED RAW MATERIALS AND SPARE PARTS AND MACHINERY REQUIRED TO MAINTAIN PRODUCTION AT EVEN LOW LEVELS.

5. THE DECLINE IN IMPORTS, AND THE CONSEQUENTIAL SHORTAGE OF INTERMEDIATE AND CONSUMER GOODS, HAS ACCELERATED THE RATE OF INFLATION IN BANGLADESH UNTIL IT MAY NOW STAND AT 60 PERCENT ANNUALLY. THE PRICE RISE HAS ALSO BEEN GIVEN ADDITIONAL IMPETUS AS A RESULT OF SMUGGLING OF RICE AND JUTE TO INDIA, FUELED BY THE 2.1 TAKA/RUPEE BLACKMARKET EXCHANGE RATE AND FURTHER PROMPTED BY THE HIGH PRICES OBTAINABLE IN SCARCITY-STRICKEN BANGLADESH FOR INDIAN CONSUMER GOODS. THE CONSEQUENCE OF RICE SMUGGLING--ESTIMATED CONSERVATIVELY AT 10 PERCENT OF BANGLADESH'S TOTAL PRODUCTION--ON SUPPLY ARE CLEAR. THE SMUGGLING OF JUTE--WE THINK IT HAS REACHED 500,000 BALES PER ANNUM AND THE BANGLADESH BANK ACKNOWLEDGES 400,000 BALES "LOST AND UNACCOUNTED"--REDUCES THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE NEEDED FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION.

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6. THE RESPONSE OF THE BDG TO ITS PRESENT PROBLEMS HAS BEEN MIXED. THE SEARCH FOR RELIEF ASSISTANCE BECAME THE CENTRAL ITEM IN ITS CONDUCT OF FOREIGN RELATIONS. MINISTERS AND SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS WERE SENT ABROAD TO PLACE THE CASE FOR ASSISTANCE BEFORE A VARIETY OF PAST, PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE

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INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EUR-08 H-01 INR-05 L-01 PM-03

PRS-01 SP-02 EB-04 SWF-01 IO-04 IGA-01 DRC-01 RSC-01

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DONORS. THE RESULTS WERE MIXED, AND THE LEVEL OF AID SOUGHT--
AND ANTICIPATED--WAS NOT FORTHCOMING. MANY FORMER AND CURRENT
DONDORS CONCLUDED THAT BANGLADESH WAS EMPHASINZING ITS SHORT-
TERM NEEDS AT THE EXPENSE OF LONGER-TERM DEVELOPMENT REQUIRE-
MENTS.

7. NEVERTHELESS, THERE WERE A LERIETY OF SIGNS WHICH
SUGGESTED THAT THE BDG HAD BEGUN TO SEE THE NEED FOR A
MORE PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO MANY OF ITS ECOMONIC PROBLEMS.
A SOMEWHAT MORE LIBERAL INVESTMENT POLICY WAS ANNOUNCED IN
JULY. CONTRACTS FOR OFFSHORE OIL EXPLORATION WITH SEVERAL
INTERNATIONAL/MULTINATIONAL OIL CMPANIES WERE SIGNED IN

SEPTEMBER. THE LAVYAST SINGLE JUTE MILL WAS GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY
"ON A TRIAL BASIS" FOR JUTE PURCHASE AND EXPORT DECISION-
MAKING. THE PROGRAM UNDER WHICH OVERSEAS BENGALEES ARE
PERMITTED TO REMIT GOODS TO RELATIVES IN BANGLADESH WHO, UPON
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PAYMENT OF IMPORT DUTY, MAY SELL THE GOODS FREELY, WAS FURTHER
LIBERALIZED. AND, PERHAPS MOST SIGNIFICNATLY, THE BDG HAS
ACCEPTED, AT LEAST IN PRINCIPLE, THE IDEA OF AN AID-TO-BANGLADESH
CONSURTUM.

8. THESE ARE, HOEWVER, ONLY INDICATION, AND MORE EVIDENCE WILL BE REQUIRED TO DEMONSOITE THAT THE BDG IS ABANDONING, AT LEAST IN PRACTICE, THE AWAMI LEAGUE'S ILL-CONTRIVED STATIST IDEOLOGY WITH ITS SOCIALIST RHETORIC. MEANWHILE, THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL CONTINUES. THE FOOD SHORTAGES AND RESULTING HIGH PRICES HAVE INTENSIFIED ALARMINGLY THE SHIFT AWAY FROM JUTE CULTIVATION IN FAVOR OF RICE: WHILE THIS MAY, IN TIME, CONTRIBUTE TO EASING THE FOOD PROBLEM, IT WILL FURTHER CURTAIL BANGLADESH'S EXPORT EARNINGS. (RAW JUTE AND MANUFACTURED JUTE PRODUCTS ACCOUNTS FOR 80-90 PERCENT OF BANGLADESH'S EXPORTS.) EFFORTS TO ENHANCE FOOD PRODUCTION WILL ALSO BE SLOWED, NOT MERELY BY THE REDUCTION OF FERTILIZER AVAILABILITY, OC- CASIONED BY BOTH LIMITED IMPORTS DUE TO INCREASED EXPENDITURE OF SCARCE FOREIGN EXCHANGE FOR FOOD IMPORTS AND HIGH PRICES PREVAILING FOR FERTILIZERS IN WORLD MARKETS, BUT ALSO BY THE DISASTROUS EXPLOSION AT THE GHORASAL FERTILIZER PLANT. THIS CATASTROPHE LEAVES BANGLADESH WITH ONLY AN INSIGNIFICANT CAPACITY FOR PRODUCING FERTILIZER DOMESTICALLY FOR THAT LEAST ONE YEAR, AND ALMOST CERTAINZY LONGER. PERHAPS THE CHIEF EFFECT OF THE GHAORASAL EXPLOSION WILL BE TO INSURE A CONTINUING NEED BY BANGLADESH TO DEVOTE VIRTUALLY ALL AVAILABLE FOREIGN EXCHANGE TO THE IMPORT OF FOODGRAINSAND FERTILIZER OVER THE COMING YEAR.

9. WITH THE ECONOMY GROWING WEAKER AND DISENCHANTMENT WITH

THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT MOUNTING, THE PRIME MINISTER'S BRIEF VISTT TO WASHINGTON TOOK ON AN IMPORTANCE IN THE EYES OF SHEIKH MUJIB, HIS GOVERNMENT, AND BENGALEES IN GENERAL FAR SURPASSING WHAT ORDINARILY MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED. THE WASHINGTON STAY WAS, LIKE BANGLADESH'S ADMISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS, SEEN AS A FURTHER DEMONSTRATION OF BANGLADESH'S ACCEPTANCE ON THE WORLD SCENE, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, IN THIS CASE , BY ONE OF THE TWO POWERS WHICH HAD BEEN DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER THE COLLAPSE OF UNTIED PAKISTAN DURING THE 1971 INDEPENDENCE

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STRUGGLE. HOWEVER, IT WAS ALSO SEEN AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SHIEKH MUJIB, WORKINGTHROUGHTHE FORCE OF HIS PERSONALITY, TO CONVINCE THE UNTIED STATES OF HIS COUNTRY' DESPERATE PLIGHT AND REVIVE THE SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY EVIDENT IN THE IMMEDIATE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD. THIS OVER-ESTIMATION OF THE AMOUNT OF AID WHICH WOULD ENSUE FROM THE VISIT MAY WELL HAVE RESULTED IN SOME DISAPPOINTMENT. IT IS THIS SAME INABILITY TO PERCIEVE MORE CLEARLY WHAT BANOZADESH CAN EXPECT, AND IN TURN WHAT DONOR COUNTRIES EXPECT OF BANGLADESH, WHICH LED TO ITS DECISION, IN PREPARATION FOR THE AID-TO- BANGLADESH CONSURTIIUM MEETING, TO COUCH ITS ASSISTANCE NEEDS

IN GAP-ANALYSIS TERMS AND ITS FAILURE TO ADDRESS LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT NEEDS MORE FULLY. HOWEVER, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE BDG IS SO THOROUGHLY PREOCCUPIED WITH ITS VERY IMMEDIATE

PROBLEM OF FEEDING ITS PEOPLE THAT IT CAN HARDLY SPARE TIME FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE LONGER TERM.

10. THE STRAINS OF THE PAST QUARTER ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE GIVEN ADDED IMPETUS TO SHEIKH MUJIB'S IMPULSE TO ALTER THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH A MORE AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM. THE BUREAUCRACY IS ILL-EQUIPPED, IN TERMS OF BOTH CADRE AND POLITICAL DIRECTION, TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS IT CONFRONTS, WHETHER AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL OR IN THE THANA. THIS HAS RESULTED IN LARGE MEASURE FROM THE INTERFERENCE OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE IN GENERAL AND SHEIKH MUJIB IN PARTICULAR. SINCE ALL DECISIONS OF ANY MOMENT ARE REFERRED TO THE PRIME MINISTER, THERE IS NO REASON TO CONCLUDE THAT AN INCREASED CENTRALIZATION OF POWER WILL OVERCOME THIS SHORTCOMING; RATHER, IT MAY ONLY BE INTENSIFIED. IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT THE AWAMI LEAGUE IS ALMOST TOTALLY DISCREDITED, AND A MORE AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM WOULD GIVE ONLY THE PRIME MINISTER A GREATER SENSE OF SECURITY. AND EVEN IF A MORE AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM IS ADOPTED, IT WILL MEAN THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD IN CONSEQUENCE PROBABLY LOSE THE SUPPORT OF MANY WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT WOULD OFFER THE OPPOSITION A CAUSE IN WHICH IT COULD COALESCE. ACCORDINGLY, SHEIKH MUJIB WOULD HAVE TO PUT HIS TRUST IN THE MILITARY, THE RAKKHI BAHINI, THE POLICE, AND THE CIVIL SERVICE. THE DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE CIVIL SERVICE AND THE MILITARY
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AND THOSE BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND THE RAKKHI BAHINI (NOW APPARENTLY BEING EXPANDED) SUGGEST THAT, IN THIS SETTING, SHEIKH MUJIB MAY SEE HIMSELF AS PLAYING THE SEVERAL ELEMENTS ONE AGAINST THE OTHER, BUT THE SCOPE FOR MISADVENTURE WOULD BE HIGH.

11. THE ODDS WOULD SEEM TO SUGGEST THAT THE EVENTS OF THE PAST QUARTER HAVE NOT LED, AND CONDITIONS OVER THE NEXT SIX WEEKS OF INTENSE FOOD SHORTAGES WILL NOT LEAD, TO A SITUATION WHICH WILL THREATEN THE LIFE OF THE BDG. HOWEVER, THERE WILL BE A FURTHER EROSION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESTIGE, ESPECIALLY AS STARVATION SPREADS; SOME WITHIN THE AWAMI LEAGUE WILL FIND MORE REASON TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM SHEIKH MUJIB; THE OPPOSITION MAY BE EMBOLDENED TO ATTEMPT SOME FORM OF CONFRONTATION WITH THE BDG; AND MUTTERINGS OF "COUP" WILL SURELY BE MORE WIDELY HEARD. THE FATALISTIC PASSIVITY OF THE BENGALIS REMAINS VERY MUCH IN EVIDENCE,

AND THERE IS NO INDICATION AS YET THAT HIS ANGUISH CAN BE
TRANSFORMED INTO
ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE BDG OPPONENTS DURING
THE WEEKS WHICH MUST PASS BEFORE THE NEXT CROP BECOMES
AVAILABLE. THE PRIME MINISTER, WHATEVER HIS SHORTCOMINGS,
COMMANDS THE RESOURCES OF GOVERNMENT AND IS DOUBTLESS AWARE
OF BOTH THE PUBLIC TEMPER AND THE PRIVATE VIEWS--AND POSSIBLY
THE PLANS--OF MANY OF HIS CRITICS. AND THE GREAT IMPONDERABLE
FOR ALL WHO WISH THE PRIME MINISTER ILL IS INDIA, WHICH WANTS
NEITHER A BANGLADESH ACTIVELY HOSTILE TO ITSELF NOR ONE
FALLING INTO CHAOS. INDIA'S INTERVENTION IN EAST PAKISTAN
IN 1971 MAY HAVE BEEN WELCOMED BY BENGALLEES THEN BUT IS
PRESENTLY SEEN AS A TROUBLING PRECEDENT.
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